



LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
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March 11, 2013

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Marvin J. Southard, D.S.W.
Director

SUBJECT: **INTEGRATED HOMELESS SERVICES**

During February 12, 2013, meeting of your Board, Supervisor Antonovich requested information concerning the manner in which the Department of Mental Health (DMH) provides services to homeless and potentially homeless individuals with mental illness. Focusing on the needs of homeless individuals with mental illness is a high priority for DMH due to the prevalence of mental illness in the homeless population. More specifically, it is estimated there are 51,000 homeless individuals living in Los Angeles County; 33% of those individuals are estimated to be suffering with mental health issues, 34% struggling with substance abuse disorders, 22% have some kind of physical disability, and 18% are veterans. This memorandum will provide you information regarding the specific programs DMH offers to individuals with mental illness who are homeless. A discussion of system improvements in process with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) are outlined at the conclusion of this document.

PROGRAMS FOCUSED ON THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Outreach and Engagement

DMH dedicates extensive resources to outreach and engagement for homeless individuals with mental illness using various strategies including (but not limited to) our directly operated mobile homeless outreach team, Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funded Full Service Partnership programs that prioritize homeless populations, and special integrated treatment teams (e.g., those funded through the MHSA Innovations program, the Street to Home project, Project 50, and others). The efforts to reach homeless individuals rely on a personal approach by outreach and engagement staff who meet and offer services to homeless individuals where they are – on the streets and in shelters. Outreach workers also assist homeless individuals with the application process necessary to qualify for benefits establishment and to meet the basic criteria for housing. Our experience is that establishing a relationship of trust is often a lengthy process but one that, over time, can successfully result in clients' entering treatment.

In order to ensure that we are able to address the multiple needs of people who are living on the streets or at risk of becoming homeless, DMH participates in a growing

number of specialized inter-agency treatment teams. One example of this approach is Project 50, established by your Board to address homelessness in the eastern downtown area of Los Angeles. Through a network of agencies such as DMH, JWCH Institute, Inc., Skid Row Housing Trust, DPSS, Department of Health Services, Public Health's Substance Abuse Prevention and Control Division, the Housing Authority for the City of Los Angeles, the Veteran's Administration, the Social Security Administration, and the Commission on Disabilities, Project 50 successfully engaged and housed the most vulnerable individuals on Los Angeles' Skid Row. DMH has also recently implemented the MHSA-funded Innovations programs including the Integrated Mobile Health Team model in which housing developers are integral partners in engaging and housing individuals with mental health needs while supportive services are delivered by representatives of health, mental health, and substance abuse agencies. Finally, DMH works with a wide variety of community-based programs that offer crucial services such as temporary shelter and other social supports. Our staff provides outreach services at year-round shelter locations and other places where homeless individuals may receive assistance.

Specific Interdepartmental Programs

The following specific interdepartmental programs focus on the needs of individuals with mental illness who are homeless or at risk of being homeless:

- **DPSS/DMH Collaboration:**
DMH staff are co-located in DPSS offices throughout Los Angeles County. In this program, DPSS workers identify individuals who may have a mental illness that requires special attention and who may qualify for disability. In such cases, the co-located DMH clinician conducts a prompt assessment; individuals with a mental illness are provided with services and, if needed, with housing resources. Please see page 4 for a description of process changes currently being designed by DMH and DPSS.
- **Sheriff's Department/Law Enforcement Agencies/DMH Collaboration:**
Often, the first point of contact for a mentally ill homeless person is a law enforcement agency or the DMH's Psychiatric Mobile Response Team (PMRT). The Department's PMRT provides joint field visits and evaluations with Sheriff's Department Deputies and local municipal law enforcement agencies' officers. Although these teams are typically employed to determine whether individuals meet the criteria for hospitalization, in addition, they are equipped to conduct homeless outreach and linkage services as needed and appropriate.
- **DMH and Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs Collaboration: Veterans and Loved Ones Recovery (VALOR) Program:**
The DMH VALOR Program provides outreach and engagement for military veterans and their family members with serious mental illness and/or

co-occurring issues, including substance abuse and chronic medical conditions. Components of the program include linkage and referral to mental health and substance abuse treatment, housing resources, and employment assistance programs for individuals with less than an honorable discharge who are not served by the Veterans' Administration. Veterans' outreach and engagement is implemented through a collaborative effort with the Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs, the California Department of Veteran's Affairs, the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, and numerous community agencies devoted to the homeless population.

Housing Supports

Under the Department of Mental Health's Justice, Housing, Employment & Education Services program, a continuum of housing resources are available to homeless DMH clients. Emphasis is placed on helping clients obtain permanent housing which is available to those currently receiving mental health services, meeting income requirements, who also have an established history of homelessness. In order to ensure clients can maintain themselves in permanent residences and provide for basic needs, DMH staff work toward establishment of benefits. Specific housing programs directly operated by DMH include the following:

- Emergency Shelter Programs for adults and transition-age youth provide short-term assistance.
- Shelter Plus Care and Homeless Section 8 vouchers provide a Federal housing subsidy that allows the tenant to pay 30% of their income toward the rent, with government funding covering the balance of the rent. DMH works with the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) and the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACOLA) to receive vouchers, enroll clients in the Section 8 programs, and provide (directly or through contract agencies) monitoring of clients receiving vouchers.
- The DMH MHSA Housing Program has developed 33 permanent supportive housing projects; 18 of these buildings are currently open and housing homeless individuals and families with mental illness.
- Rental Assistance provides short-term funding for homeless clients, as well as those clients at risk of homelessness. This program is able to offer an array of supports, including security deposits, household goods, and an eviction prevention program to clients in specialty programs that qualify.

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Facilitating Collaboration: Streamlining the DPSS-DMH Process

The Directors of DPSS and DMH conferred about mechanisms for streamlining the process by which individuals with mental illness are assisted with General Relief (GR) and other DPSS entitlements. The particular case brought to their attention by the Board was used as an example to determine if there were immediate or longer term actions that ought to be taken. They determined that DMH co-located staff may reduce duplication of effort by meeting briefly with clients who receive a referral from a County mental health program in order to obtain necessary consents. However, the more lengthy assessment conducted for new referrals can be waived for those already engaged in mental health treatment. This modification will streamline the process of being determined as Needing Special Assistance (the category that is exempt from the work requirements of GR to receive continuing benefits) for many homeless individuals. Further, they directed their staff to analyze the application process to see if there are other efficiencies that might be undertaken. This analysis is currently on going.

If you have any questions, please contact my office or the Department's Adult System of Care Deputy Director, Ms. Cathy Warner, L.C.S.W., at (213) 738-2756 or by e-mail to cwarner@dmh.lacounty.gov.

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